THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

1. A dock leveler comprising a support, a deck pivotally secured to said support at one end for movement between a stored position and an elevated position, a deck lip pivotally connected to said deck assembly at an opposite end to said one end for movement between a pendent stored position and a bridging position projecting from said deck assembly, a lift mechanism acting on said deck assembly to lift it toward said elevated position, a lip operating mechanism operatively connected to said lip to move it from said pendant position to said bridging position upon attainment of said elevated position, and a latch to hold said lip in said bridging position, said latch releasing said lip upon relative movement between said lip and said deck assembly and having a yieldable connection to permit limited pivotal movement between said lip and said deck assembly upon application of a force thereto.

2. A dock leveler according to claim 1 wherein said latch is moved from an inactive position to an active position in engagement with said lip upon said deck assembly attaining said elevated position.

3. A dock leveler according to claim 2 wherein said latch is moved to said active position by a latch setting mechanism, movement of said deck assembly from said elevated position releasing said latch setting mechanism.

4. A dock leveler according to claim 3 wherein said latch setting mechanism includes a lost motion device acting between said support and said deck assembly to accommodate movement of said deck assembly from said elevated position.

5. A dock leveler according to claim 4 wherein said latch is pivotally mounted to said deck assembly and said latch setting mechanism pivots said latch into engagement with said lip upon attainment of said elevated position.

6. A dock leveler according to claim 5 wherein said lost motion device includes a tensile member acting between said support frame and said latch.

7. A dock leveler according to claim 1 wherein said yieldable connection includes a latch spring operable to hold said lip in said bridging position and rotational movement of said lip relative to said deck assembly is accommodated by flexure of said spring.

8. A dock leveler according to claim 7 wherein said latch spring acts upon a link mounted on said lip and rotation of said lip beyond a predetermined position relative to said deck assembly causes said link and spring to disengage and permit said lip to move to said pendant position.

9. A dock leveler according to claim 8 wherein disengagement of said link and latch spring releases said latch to permit said latch to return to said inactive position.

10. A dock leveler according to claim 9 wherein said latch is pivotally connected to said deck assembly and includes a plunger operable upon said link and biased into abutment with said link by said latch spring.

11. A dock leveler according to claim 10 wherein a stop limits movement of said plunger toward said link.

12. A dock leveler according to claim 11 wherein pivotal movement of said latch beyond said active position is inhibited by a stop to maintain said plunger in a position for engagement with said link.

13. A dock leveler according to claim 10 wherein said link has a radiussed tip in abutments with said plunger.

14. A dock leveler according to claim 7 wherein a counterbalance spring acts upon said lip, said counterbalance spring and said latch spring having a combined force sufficient to maintain said lip in said bridging position.

15. A dock leveler according to claim 14 wherein said spring and said counterbalance spring act in parallel upon said lip.

16. A dock leveler comprising a support frame, a deck assembly pivotally secured to said frame at one end for movement between a stored position and an elevated position, a deck lip pivotally connected to said deck assembly at an opposite end to said one end for movement between a pendant stored position and a bridging position projecting from said deck, a lift mechanism acting on said deck to bias it toward said elevated position, a lip operating mechanism operatively connected to said lip to move it from said pendant

position to said bridging position upon attainment of said elevated position and including a first tensile member acting between said support frame and said lip to initiate movement from said pendant position as said deck assembly approaches said elevated position, and a latch to hold said lip in said bridging position, said latch being moveable from an inactive position to an active position in which said latch acts upon said lip as said deck assembly approaches said elevated position, said latch having a yieldable connection to permit limited pivotal movement between said lip and said deck assembly upon application of a force thereto.

17. A dock leveler according to claim 16 wherein said latch is moved to said active position by a second tensile member.

18. A dock leveler according to claim 17 wherein said tensile members operate conjointly as said deck assembly approaches said elevated position to move said lip and said latch respectively.

19. A dock leveler according to claim 16 wherein said yieldable connection includes a latch spring acting upon said lip to bias said lip to said bridging position.

20. A dock level according to claim 19 wherein a stop is positioned to limit the action of said latch spring on said lip, pivotal movement of said lip relative to said deck thereby disengaging said lip from said latch and permitting said latch to return to said inactive position.

21. A dock leveler according to claim 20 wherein said latch is pivotally connected to said deck assembly and is maintained in said active position by engagement with said lip when said deck is moved form said elevated position.

22. A dock leveler according to claim 21 wherein said spring acts through a plunger to engage a link secured to said lip, said plunger and link abutting to maintain said latch in said active position.

23. A dock leveler according to claim 22 wherein said stop acts on said plunger to limit movement thereof.